

U.S. Reportedly Directs Lao Units From Thailand

By TAMMY ARBUCKLE

Special to The Star

VIENTIANE, Laos—Americans are directing from Thailand Lao guerrilla units in militarily and politically

most-exposed places of the Laotian war, from Long Chien in the north to Bolovens Plateau in the south, top Lao military sources say.

"Americans pick up the radio and tell the units what to do. It's nothing to do with us," a member of the Lao general staff said.

This is the first time the Lao military has admitted the Americans have a command role in the Lao fighting which they say is directed from Udorn, a base in northeast Thailand.

Admission comes on the heels of rightist military disclosure of an agreement for South Vietnamese intervention in southern Laos and similar agreements with Thailand.

Lao generals have said that, if either Long Chien or Bolovens Plateau falls, they will reject the neutrality of Premier Souvanna Phouma and form an official alliance with Saigon, Bangkok and Phnom Penh against Hanoi.

American officials here claim the rightist generals are making these statements now to embarrass Souvanna.

These officials ignore Washington's ambivalence over reports that a South Vietnamese invasion of southern Laos has begun.

While the rightist generals may be trying to embarrass Souvanna, much of the problem would seem to result from U.S. policies.

For years, U.S. ambassadors here have supported Souvanna with words but continued to supply the rightwing generals with money, arms and encouragement, allowing the neutralist army to dwindle.

Lao rightists have flown often to South Vietnam for consultations with President Nguyen Van Thieu's officers.

Lao Gen. Etam Singvongsa visited Cambodia as soon as Lon Nol came to power.

These visits were to discuss South Vietnamese battalion-sized forays into Lao, the use of Thai troops in Laos and the training of Cambodians here.

The result has been that Souvanna has become a mere figurehead.

Laos long has been a covert member of the South Vietnam-Thai alliance. The CIA, which has helped coordinate the alliance employing U.S. ground commanders, also has committed the U.S. by proxy to the

All this has been done under the cover of pleas to influential senators that U.S. security was at stake.

Given the most likely scenario now of a South Vietnam incursion into Laos and a North Vietnamese move against the Bolovens or Plateau or a Hanoi success in taking Lon Chien, the result could be a CIA debacle.

For, while an Asian military alliance against Hanoi might result and the Indochina war is shifted further from Saigon and Cambodia to Laos, the U.S. would be committed to helping Laos, a nation bordering China, Laos, beset by corruption and inefficiency, would be unable to bear the brunt of war alone. Its fall would endanger the U.S. in Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Lao armored cars took up positions at Vientiane Airport and U.S. aircraft normally parked at Vientiane, were flown to the Thai base at Udorn. Lao military sources said these precautions were taken at all Laos airfields in case the North Vietnamese attack following reports of invasion in the south.

CIA-Backed Laotians Said Entering China

By Michael Morrow

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VIENTIANE, Laos — United States intelligence operations in Laos, the one out of Nam Lieu include the sending of armed Laotian reconnaissance teams into China from northern Laos, sources here say. Teams are reported to have gone as far as 200 miles into China, dispatched from a secret CIA outpost 15 minutes' flying time north of the Laotian opium center at Houei Sai.

According to sources close to the Central Intelligence Agency, and confirmed by Western diplomatic sources in Vientiane, the CIA is sending out hill tribesmen armed with American weapons, a three-pound radio with a range of 400 miles and equipment to tap Chinese telegraph lines, watch roads and do other types of intelligence gathering.

"There is always a team in China," sources close to the CIA said.

Staging area for the operation is a small mountain valley airstrip, called Nam Lieu (also known as Nam Yu). The strip, which one Air America pilot describes as "difficult as hell to get into," is surrounded by mountains. It is serviced by both Air America and Continental Air Service, and is also a way-station for opium traders from northern Laos and Burma en route to drug factories at Houei Sai.

During 1968, five Chinese functionaries caught up in the purges of the Cultural Revolution defected to a Nam Lieu reconnaissance team. They were treated well by the Americans for a time but eventually were turned over to the Royal Laotian government.

According to sources close to the CIA, the five were thrown into a 12 by 12 by 12 foot pit exposed to the elements. They were eventually executed.

Like most CIA operations in Laos, the one out of Nam Lieu is directed from a headquarters at Udorn air base in northeastern Thailand. There are several Americans at Nam Lieu, including CIA and military intelligence personnel. Sources close to the CIA report the number has increased recently from four to more than 10.

In addition to activities inside China, the Nam Lieu Americans also help direct a joint operation of "SGU" (special guerrilla units) and the Thai army at Xieng Lom south of Houei Sai on the Lao-Thai border. They also run intelligence-gathering missions on a road being built by the Chinese government (under an agreement reached with the now-defunct coalition government of Laos) in the same vicinity.

Until mid-September of last year, the Nam Lieu operation was headed by a rough-and-tumble veteran guerrilla organizer named Anthony "Tony" Poe. Poe is a legendary figure in Laos known best for his dislike of journalists, disregard for orders and radio codes, capacity for Lao whiskey and expertise at clandestine guerrilla operations.

Poe was removed almost immediately after an article last September by Dispatch News Service International on the Nam Lieu operations, ostensibly because the article "blew his cover." According to sources close to the CIA, however, this reason was an excuse used by the American embassy here to get rid of Poe, whose style has been a source of long-term friction with members of the American mission in Laos including Ambassador McMurtrie Godley.

The September story was reportedly a major concern of CIA Director Richard Helms

when he visited Laos in the fall. Helms was quite upset that there might be a leak within the CIA in Laos, sources close to the CIA report.

Whether by design or coincidence, Vince Shields, in charge of CIA operations at Long Cheng on the edge of the Plain of Jars north of Vientiane, and Patrick Devlin, station chief for the CIA in Vientiane, have both been transferred.

As for the mission into China, sources close to the CIA and Western diplomatic sources both report that to their knowledge the missions are continuing.

Since leaving Nam Lieu, Poe has spent most of his time at Udorn air base, although one source reported that Poe continued to do "odd jobs" on the Thai-Cambodian border. Those who know him say he is unhappy away from Nam Lieu.

Poe is an ex-Marine noncommissioned officer, wounded at Iwo Jima, who remained in Asia after World War II. In the 1950s he helped organize CIA-trained Tibetan insurgents, escorting them to Colorado for training and going back with them into Tibet.

Later he worked in the Thai-Cambodian border area with the Khmer Serai, anti-Sihanouk guerrillas receiving assistance from the CIA, and other parts of Thailand. He has been in and out of Laos since before the Geneva Accords of 1962 and was one of the first Americans involved in arming and training paramilitary groups in Laos.

Poe is considered stubborn and brusque, sometimes going into fits of anger over the radio, his lifeline with the outside world. He is said to prefer working with hill tribes to working with Americans and looks down on most American operations because of their heavy reliance on American personnel.

He has been wounded at least once during his career in Laos, and reportedly a price has been put on his head by the Pathet Lao. He is perhaps the only American legally married to a woman of the hill tribes.

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LAOS

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Congress and the War - 3

Dec. 18, 1970

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Congress and the Indochina War: 1970 Chronology

Feb. 2. Senate Foreign Relations Committee made public a report, "Vietnam: December 1969," criticizing the Administration's Vietnamization policy. (*Weekly Report* p. 336)

Feb. 18. The President issued a 40,000-word message to Congress, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: A New Strategy for Peace." (*Text and summary, Weekly Report* p. 509)

Feb. 25, 26, 27. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense heard a report on the Vietnamization progress from Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird. (*Weekly Report* p. 684)

March 6. President Nixon lifted the official lid of secrecy on U.S. military involvement in Laos with a 3,000-word statement which drew sharp comment from members on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. (*Weekly Report* p. 761)

April 12. After a delay of more than five months, a Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee released a censored transcript of closed hearings held in October 1969 on U.S. military involvement in Laos. (*Fact sheet, Weekly Report* p. 1243)

April 30. President Nixon announced that American troops had been sent into battle in Cambodia. (*Weekly Report* p. 1151)

May 2. Senators George McGovern (D S.D.), Harold E. Hughes (D Iowa), Alan Cranston (D Calif.), Charles E. Goodell (R N.Y.) and Mark O. Hatfield (R Ore.) announced plans to offer an amendment to eliminate spending for military operations in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia by the end of 1970. (*Weekly Report* p. 1208)

May 5. A May 1 Senate Foreign Relations Committee report on a resolution (S Con Res 64) to repeal the 1964 Tonkin Gulf resolution was recommitted to the Committee. (*Weekly Report* p. 1207)

May 6. House passed a bill (HR 17123) authorizing \$20.2 million for military procurement and research in fiscal 1971 and rejected amendments that would have restricted use of U.S. troops in Southeast Asia. (*Weekly Report* p. 1209)

May 13. The Senate began debate on the Foreign Military Sales bill (HR 15628), the vehicle for an amendment offered by Senators Frank Church (D Idaho) and John Sherman Cooper (R Ky.) designed to prohibit U.S. military activities in Cambodia. (*Weekly Report* p. 1272)

June 6. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee released a report, "Cambodia: May 1970," disputing the military reason given by President Nixon for ordering the intervention into Cambodia and indicating that the military gains were outweighed by the risks of a broadened war in Indochina. (*Weekly Report* p. 1534)

June 24. Senate adopted an amendment to repeal the 1964 Tonkin Gulf resolution. (*Weekly Report* p. 1615)

June 30. The Senate by a 58-37 roll-call vote passed a modified Cooper-Church amendment and the Foreign Military Sales Bill (HR 15628) after seven weeks of debate. (*Weekly Report* p. 1671)

President Nixon issued a statement on the 60-day U.S. operation in Cambodia stating it had been successfully concluded and that no American ground personnel would re-enter Cambodia in the future. (*Weekly Report* p. 1673)

July 6. A special House committee issued a report on "U.S. Involvement in Southeast Asia" (H Rept 91-1276), after undertaking a two-week fact-finding mission to the region.

July 9. The House rejected a motion to instruct House conferees to agree to the Senate-passed Cooper-Church amendment. (*Weekly Report* p. 1779)

July 10. The Senate Adopted by a 57-5 roll-call vote a concurrent resolution (S Con Res 64) reaffirming the repeal of the 1964 Tonkin Gulf resolution. (*Weekly Report* p. 1777)

Aug. 20, 21. The Senate approved amendments to the defense procurement bill (HR 17123) to deny U.S. allowances to allied troops in South Vietnam to be any higher than those paid to American troops and to forbid use of U.S. funds to pay foreign troops fighting for Cambodia and Laos. (*Weekly Report* p. 2172)

Sept. 1. The Senate defeated by a 39-55 roll-call vote the Hatfield-McGovern amendment to HR 17123 which would have imposed a deadline for withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam. (*Weekly Report* p. 2170)

Oct. 7. President Nixon in a televised speech proposed a cease-fire in Vietnam and widened peace talks to include nations not present at the Paris peace talks. (*Congressional reaction, Weekly Report* p. 2495)

Nov. 16. The House by a 288-39 roll-call vote passed a joint resolution (H J Res 1355) defining the war-making powers of the President. The bill then went to the Senate. (*Weekly Report* p. 2817)

Nov. 18. President Nixon sent a message to Congress requesting \$1 billion in supplementary foreign aid including \$65 million for Vietnamization and \$255 million in military and economic aid for Cambodia. (*Weekly Report* p. 2834)

Nov. 23. Debate over U.S. policy revived in the aftermath of an attempt to rescue American prisoners of war near Hanoi and large-scale air strikes over North Vietnam. (*Weekly Report* p. 2874)

Dec. 3. The Senate Appropriations Committee added a prohibition against the entry of U.S. ground combat troops into Cambodia when it considered the \$66-billion fiscal 1971 defense appropriations bill (HR 19590). The Senate passed the bill Dec. 8. (*Weekly Report* p. 2933)

Dec. 7. The House approved a resolution (H Res 1282) commending the courage displayed by the official command, officers and men involved in the Nov. 21 attempt to rescue U.S. prisoners believed to be held captive near Hanoi. (*Weekly Report* p. 2937)

Dec. 9. The House Appropriations Committee reported HR 19928, a \$990 million supplemental foreign aid bill for fiscal 1971 including \$255 million for Cambodia. The House by a 249-102 vote passed a bill (HR 19911) authorizing \$550 million in foreign aid, including \$255 million for Cambodia. (*Weekly Report* p. 2935)